HSUS Investigation Leads to Fifty Arrests in Cockfight Raid
The Humane Society of the United States
CLOSE-UP REPORT

HSUS INVESTIGATION LEADS TO FIFTY ARRESTS IN COCKFIGHT RAID

Participants Fined Up to $500

Fifty people have been arrested and found guilty under California cruelty statutes as spectators or participants at a cockfight as a result of an undercover investigation conducted by The Humane Society of the United States.

Fifteen of those arrested pled guilty to charges of participating in the event. They received fines ranging from $95 to $515, the maximum possible under the law. The rest were given citations as spectators at the fight, and were fined from $95 to $350. Those arrested included several juveniles, most of whom were brought to the cockfight by their parents.

Because cockfighting is illegal in California, cockfights are held in the strictest secrecy. An HSUS undercover informant, posing as a cockfighting enthusiast, managed to win the confidence of some members of the cockfighting fraternity near Sacramento, California. After several months of undercover work, he was finally invited to a major Derby meet on Sunday, April 23rd. He immediately began arrangements to have the fight raided and participants arrested. Three members of the HSUS Investigations Department, Frantz Dantzler, Phil Steward, and Marc Paulhus, flew to California to set up the raid. (The full story of the investigations and police work behind the raid is on page 2 of this report.)

Cruelty Disguised as Sport

Cockfighting has a large, mostly underground following in the United States. Cockers, as lovers of this “sport” call themselves, claim great affection for their gallant fighting roosters. They are willing to pour large amounts of money into breeding, raising, conditioning and equipping their gamecocks, and will travel great distances to fight them.

In truth, these birds are bred and raised only to cut and slash one another to death to provide a bloody spectacle for a cheering crowd. The affection cockers claim for their “pets” is reserved for the winners. Losers are objects for contempt and disgust. Worst of all is the occasional rooster that would rather run than fight. This is humiliating for its handler, and usually earns the rooster a speedy death at the hands of its supposedly loving owner.

A cockfight may last up to twenty minutes, and by the end of it at least one, and sometimes both, birds are dead or mortally wounded. The average life span of a gamecock is short; a bird that makes it through even six fights alive is considered exceptional.

Centuries of breeding for maximum aggressiveness has accentuated this quality in gamecocks. They are man-made killers, and man is to blame for carefully breeding in the extreme aggressiveness and instinct to fight that will eventually lead them to a bloody and painful death.

Cockers frequently try to justify their sport by saying the birds are “natural fighters,” ignoring the fact that it is man’s meddling with nature that has made them this way.

The gamecock’s method of fighting is to

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One of the live gamecocks confiscated in the cockfight raid. His comb has been cut off in preparation for the fight, so it cannot be a target for the other rooster. Forty-four live birds were found in carrying cases after the raid.
RAID

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legally fought gamecocks with the full tree to the inner circle of cockers was a teenager boy. This youngster raised and il­legal knowledge of his parents. cockfighting in northern California began at the boy's house at 5 am on a Saturday. The actual raid was over in minutes. Unlike the TV shows, the drama and the Our undercover investigator's initial en­trée to the inner circle of cockers was a teenage boy. This youngster raised and il­legal knowledge of his parents. The drama that was to put a damper on the site chosen for the Derby had been provided with two canvas-walled pits, where the birds would fight. The larger pit was the Derby pit, the scene of the main fights. When the main fight got to the point where neither of the birds was dead, but one or the other was too injured to fight activ­ely, they would be removed to the smaller Drag pit to finish the fight. The Drag pit was also used for hackfights between unproven cocks. A table with a set of scales served as a check-in point before the fights. Each cock was carefully weighed and matched with another cock as close to its weight as possible. For a Derby event, the fighting cocks must weigh within two ounces of each other.

On one side was a beer keg and hot dog stand, evidence that these fights were supposed to be part of a pleasant after­noon's entertainment.

Men were charged a five dollar admission to the event. Women and children got in free. Cockers are anxious to insure the con­tinuation of their sport, and encourage the training of children in the raising and handling of gamecocks.

Nine Derby fights and a number of hackfights took place before the police ar­rived. Eleven birds died, and were uncer­emoniously tossed in the bushes. The birds are not required to fight to the death, and a cocker may remove his fowl from the pit at any time and forfeits the match. Most cockers prefer to leave their birds in the fight, even if it is obviously unable or un­willing to fight back due to its injuries. This kind of cruelty is unnecessary even by the rules of the cocker's own game, but it il­lustrates the cocker's apparent delight at the bloodshed and suffering of the birds. Gambling is one of the major attractions of a cockfight, and HSUS' informant saw a lot of money changing hands in main bets, and side bets, among the spectators. After the arrest, more than $4000 was found in the posses­sion of various members of the crowd. This was certainly more than was needed to pur­thestock. The drama and the danger were very real! In the back of our undercover agent's mind was the two California humane officers who dis­appeared in 1976 while they were investigating cockfighting. Our undercover investigator's initial en­trée to the inner circle of cockers was a teenage boy. This youngster raised and il­legal knowledge of his parents. The drama that was to put a damper on the site chosen for the Derby had been provided with two canvas-walled pits, where the birds would fight. The larger pit was the Derby pit, the scene of the main fights. When the main fight got to the point where neither of the birds was dead, but one or the other was too injured to fight activ­ely, they would be removed to the smaller Drag pit to finish the fight. The Drag pit was also used for hackfights between unproven cocks. A table with a set of scales served as a check-in point before the fights. Each cock was carefully weighed and matched with another cock as close to its weight as possible. For a Derby event, the fighting cocks must weigh within two ounces of each other.

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THE RAID...

Unlike the crime shows we see on TV, this case and its culmination, the raid, took several months to develop. The HSUS undercover investigator had to infiltrate the ranks of the northern California cockers, became a trusted “buddy,” and be invited to several backyard cockfights before he was allowed to become a spectator at a ma­jor Derby.

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In the front compartment of this box are steel gaffs. These implements were seized as evidence.

The police quickly took control of the area. As those arrested were led up the hill to waiting police cars, HSUS Investigators Dantzler and Paulhus began to document the evidence found around the site.

Several boxes or bags of cockfighting implements (gaffs, scissors, string, cotton, antibiotics, alcohol) were found. Forty-four live birds were confiscated in their carrying cases. The El Dorado County Department of Animal Control assisted in gathering the live birds and loaded them into a trailer to be taken to the animal shelter.

After the suspects had been found guilty and fined, the court ordered that the confiscated birds be euthanized because they probably would end up in the hands of other cockfighters if they were released. The birds were humanely euthanized with an injection of sodium pentobarbital.

You Can Help

HSUS has long worked to bring an end to such blood sports as cockfighting, dogfighting, and bullfighting. It is not enough to pass laws against such animal abuses. The laws must be enforced. Each successful raid, like this one, should serve as a warning to cockfighters that there are humanitarians and organizations willing to spend the time, money and effort necessary to break through their secretive defenses and put an end to their cruel games.

You can help in your community by informing your local humane society or police department of any knowledge you have on cockfighting in your area. Cockfighting is illegal in most states, but the breeding and selling of gamecocks is not. Although there are legitimate breeders of gamecocks, many breed them only to fight them. If you know of any such activity in your neighborhood, listen for rumors of fights. Do not attempt to infiltrate the cockfighters group yourself. Cockfighters feel strongly that they have a “right” to their cruel pastime, and will sometimes defend this right violently.

You can help HSUS fight to end blood sports with your contributions. Your dollars will enable HSUS investigators to travel, seek evidence, and press for convictions.

There are thousands of animals in this country whose lives are destined to end painfully in a flurry of blood and feathers unless we see to it that laws against cockfighting are enforced. Use the enclosed envelope to send HSUS a contribution today so we can continue to fight for the animals.

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